

February 13, 2023

Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Human Services Committee in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status.

Co-Chairs Senator Lesser and Representative Gilchrist, Ranking Members Senator Seminara and Representative Case, and Distinguished Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is F. Bernard Forand, and I live in Hartford. I am a member of St. Patrick's St. Anthony's Church, and my congregation is a member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), a broad-based organization of 49 faith institutions working together to advance social justice in our region and state.

I am writing in support of HB 6616: An Act Concerning Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to Those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status.

This issue matters to me because I have personally experienced significant depression for much of my life. I was fortunate in that I received strong emotional and financial support from my family with educational assistance and comprehensive medical insurance.

The Problem:

- As I have experienced, even with a comprehensive insurance plan, it was very difficult to find a long-lasting effective drug that would give me the relief that I sought. For many years I had to take one medication after another and found that after a year or so most of the medications that were prescribed for me failed to work any longer, and my depression recurred. It took me over 20 years to find a medication that gave me significant long lasting from my depression.

If I had not had access to medication, I would have found it extremely difficult if not impossible to hold a job and fulfill my responsibilities as a member of the community and support my family.

- I can't imagine how difficult it must be for an uninsured person to get adequate care given the paucity of available resources and the high cost of patient care. Paying out of pocket is unaffordable even for middle-income people, let alone for folks with lower incomes.
- Members of the immigrant community, *including 58% of undocumented persons in our state*, have no form of health insurance to cover mental or physical health

care (compared to just 5% of the overall population). In addition, being a member of a marginalized community increases the risk of mental health challenges due to the impacts of prejudice and systemic oppression. Meanwhile, *undocumented people pay \$187 million annually in Connecticut taxes.*

The Solution:

- Unlike some private coverage, HUSKY insurance offers true mental health parity, covering mental health on par with physical health. Expanding access to HUSKY by passing HB 6616 will provide critical access to care, including for adolescents and young adults, during the years when major mental health disorders often emerge.
- Expanding HUSKY to undocumented people is not a controversial issue and is supported by a majority of CT voters. 57% of voters support expanding HUSKY to all undocumented immigrants, including 84% of Democrats, 83% of Black voters, and 76% of Latinx voters.

Expanding HUSKY access to all income-eligible people, regardless of immigration status, will meaningfully expand access to mental (as well as physical) health care to people who are currently excluded yet provide important services to our state. It is economically sensible, and the best way to increase the number of productive residents of Connecticut.

More than that, it is the moral, just, and faithful thing to do. HB 6616 is an important step in this direction. Please advance this bill out of committee in its current form, and then champion it in the full legislature. I look forward to supporting your efforts.

Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

F. Bernard Forand
99 N Beacon St
Hartford CT 06105